

Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.
Editor: Michael P. Birks, 36 Trevor Road, Flixton, Manchester M41 5QH. England. 0161 747 5924.

Vol.IV, No. 74

Sample copy \$1 / 75p to non-members, see inside cover.

January 1999

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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The Central American Group is a part of the Spanish Main Philatelic Society, the leading Society in the world for collectors of Latin America. The journal of the SMPS is *The Mainsheet*, published quarterly, and is free with your subscription. The Secretary is Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, Peterborough PE3 8TQ, England. Phone 01733 2687078. The subscription is currently £8 in Europe or \$20 elsewhere. Cheques in sterling or US\$ should be made payable to "The Spanish Main". A three year subscription of £21/\$54 and a five year subscription of £30/\$80 are available and payment for these longer subscriptions may be made by Access, Mastercard or Visa. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining during the course of the year the appropriate part subscriptions should be added - Feb-Apr £6/\$15; May-Aug £4/\$10; Sep-Nov £2/\$5 to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect.

The Central American Group caters for the collectors of Mexico to Panama. Its journal, which you are now reading, is published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription. The subscription is currently £8/\$15 resident in the UK or in Europe, or £11/\$19 elsewhere. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining after June 1st, add 50% to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect. Cheques in sterling payable to "The CA Group" should be sent to the treasurer, David Hankey, 2 Prince's Drive, Marple, Stockport SK6 6NJ, England. Phone 0161-449 0693. We shall be pleased to forward the relevant portions of multi-subscription cheques to the SMPS or the Chile Group for overseas members.

We regret we cannot accept dollar cheques for subscriptions because each cheque costs a minimum of £5/\$8 to negotiate.

Back issues are available to members at 75p/\$1.50 each, although Volumes 1 and 2 are sold out. Non-members may request a sample copy for 75p/\$1.50 post paid. Requests for back issues should be sent to the Editor, to whom cheques should be made payable. Payments must be made in sterling or in dollar bills.

The group leader is Richard Saundry, Gwrych Cottage, Godstone Road, Bletchingley, Redhill, Surrey RH1 4PL, England. Phone 01883 742186.

The group does not run a packet. The SMPS Packet Secretary is Brian Sylvester, 3 Russell Court, St Lukes Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7AP, England. Phone 01628 784555.

Although most packets are of a general nature, there are occasional specialised one country packets. Good and unusual material is always wanted.

Owing to insurance difficulties, the packet is not available to overseas members, although we shall be pleased to accept material for inclusion from them.

The auctioneer of the SMPS is Brian Moorhouse, to whom Auction and Private Treaty lots should be sent. Brian is a dealer, and will include your name on his mailing list if requested to do so.

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Vol.IV, No. 74

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EDITORIAL

If you have renewed your subscription to our journal we thank you and hope that you find plenty of interest in it over the coming year. If however you have not, we hope to hear from you soon.

You may have noticed that this issue has been almost completely my work. My role as Editor is intended to be the editing of the work of others but without contributions this has not proved possible. This issue has been put together more by luck than management since without a file of photocopied articles I would not have had the content to put it together. So this would be a good time to send me a contribution for the remaining three issues. If you feel unable to write an article yourself may I suggest that a previously published article which you can illustrate would be equally welcome. We have blanket permission to reprint from current LA journals, but for many of these the illustrations are unsuitable for reproduction. Indeed you may well have better material than that used for the article. Either way a greater input from the readership is needed to preserve the continuation of your journal. Five more issues and we have been going 20 years!

If you would like a chart which enables you to convert a date into a day of the week please let me know and I will send you one. Did you know the Penny Black was first officially used on a Wednesday? You would if you had this chart which works for all the C19th and C20th. A stamp would be appreciated.

Many of you already know that I travel all over the country giving displays of Nicaragua. Distance is no object and unless I am booked for consecutive nights I do not require overnight accommodation. I recently had a very pleasant three night tour of southern England and am happy to come to your local society if you can get your secretary to invite me. All I ask is for the cost of fuel. With consecutive bookings the accommodation cost could be shared between societies unless someone would put me up. I show either Nicaragua generally, *Nicaragua 1779-1979*, or material related to the numerous revolutions, *Nicaraguan Revolutions*. From 2000 (Twenty-hundred!) I shall also have available *Nicaragua II: The Sequel*. All are aimed at the general audience with interesting items for the specialist.

Finally a reminder that the December meeting is also the Spanish Main Cup, and overseas entries may be colour photocopies accompanied by a précis of the exhibit. We have already received one entry from the United States and hope for many more.

mpb

For the diary:- **Saturday 5 December 1998** 10.30 a.m. - 3.30 p.m.
Spanish Main Meeting at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, London SE1.

Saturday 16 January 1999 1.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m.
Spanish Main Meeting at York Stamp Fair

Saturday 6 March 1999 Time to be arranged.
Spanish Main Meeting at the Horticultural Halls, London,
during the London International Stamp and Cover Show.

Saturday 15 May 1999 1.00 p.m. - 4.30 p.m. (with prior viewing)
Brian Moorhouse Auction at the Station Hotel, Peterborough

HONDURAS: THE MORAZAN ISSUE

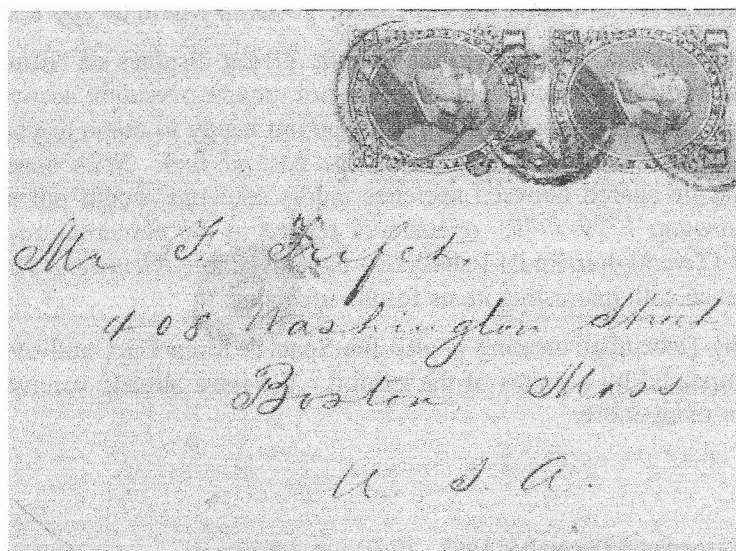
(Part 2 - The Stamps)

Edited and Illustrated by MICHAEL P BIRKS FRPSL

The stamps were engraved and printed by the National Bank Note Company of New York. The make-up of the sheets is rather curious: the sheets contained 80 stamps in 10 rows of 8. There were two different marginal inscriptions on the sheets, each occurring twice.

On the sheets of the 1 centavo, 2 centavos and ½ real, above the 4th and 5th stamps of the top row, and below the corresponding stamps on the bottom row, there is a solid panel with beaded edge inscribed "ENGRAVED & PRINTED BY THE ——— NATIONAL BANK-NOTE CO. NEW YORK" in two lines of colourless capitals: at each side opposite the 5th and 6th rows, with the foot of the letters next to the stamps, is a long narrow solid panel with beaded edge, inscribed "COMPANIA NACIONAL DE BILLETES DE BANCO, NUEVA YORK" in colourless capitals.

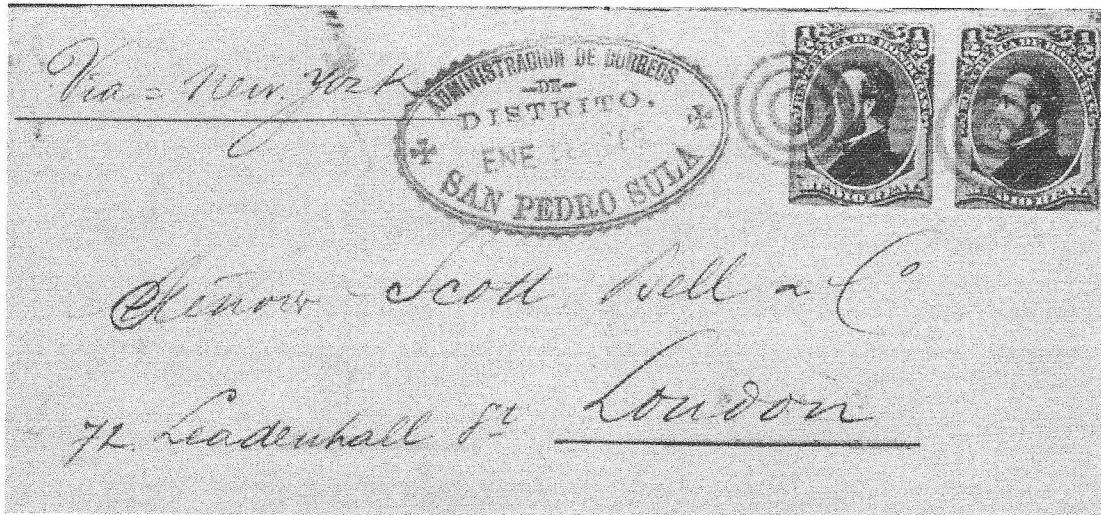
The arrangement of these inscriptions on the sheets of the other values, 1 real, 2 reales, 4 reales and 1 peso, was different, the first inscription being at the top and right side of the sheets, and the second at the bottom and left side.



A vertical pair of the 1 centavo purple tied by violet cancels on a cover to Boston, USA.
Boston arrival mark for 23 November 1889 on the back.

The paper is the next subject for consideration and it is important to be quite clear as to its characteristics, in view of the reprints made by Seebeck in 1889. The paper is a thin hard white wove so thin that the design shows clearly through at the back.

The gum is thin, colourless and transparent; this is also important to remember in view of the 1889 printings. The stamps are perforated 12 on a single-line machine.



18 January 1889. A pair of the ½ real tied by small purple target cancels on cover to England. The cover is endorsed "Via New York" in manuscript on the front and bears transit marks for Puerto Cortez, New Orleans and New York and a London arrival mark, all struck on the back.

E W Wetherell, writing in the *Philatelic Journal of India* described the production of the values starting from the portrait.

"... the portrait was engraved on a background of horizontal lines and a few diagonal lines in the upper part, and seven secondary dies were made from this original engraving - each of these was worked up by the engraver with scroll work numerals, the value in words, and the upper inscription 'Republica de Honduras'. At the same time he added to the original portions as follows: in the 1 real and 4 reales he ruled vertical lines in the shading, these are continuous and straight. In the 2 reales he ruled vertical lines, but they are continuous and straight only in the upper portions, and from the mouth downwards they are far apart and irregular, consequently there is a 'light effect' in the lower portion of the background of this value."

There are also numerous guide-dots to be noticed in these stamps. The 1 centavo shows a guide-dot in the uncoloured oval nearly opposite the tip of the nose. the ½ real shows a similar dot, and also a very minute dot outside the design under the 'O' of 'MEDIO'.

The 2 reales always shows a minute dot in the collar. In addition to these dots peculiar to certain denominations, the stamps in the top row of sheets of all values show a guide-dot just over the left numeral of value, except the fifth stamp which shows two dots: between the fourth and fifth stamps of the top row there is also another dot level with the top of the design; in the ½ real there are two dots, one above the other. The stamps in the bottom row also show dots under the left corner of the design, the fifth stamp showing two dots in that position.

The 1 centavo comes in violet varying from pale to medium, very different from the deep violet of the later printings. The 2 centavos was printed in a rich red-brown: the ½ real in full black. Of the 1 real, at least three different shades are to be found, which might be described as dull green, deep dull green and deep green, all of them quite distincy from the black-green of the reprints.



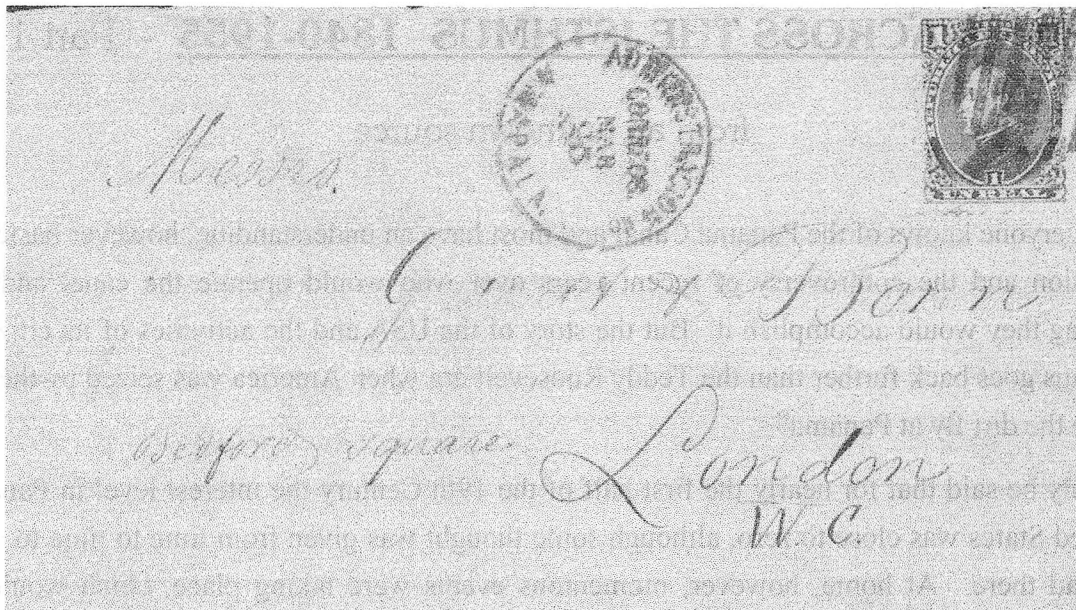
8 November 1889. A horizontal strip of five of the 2 centavos brown, tied by small purple target cancels, from San Pedro Sula to Germany.

Transit marking on the back are from Puerto Cortez and New Orleans with an Altenburg arrival mark.

The illustration below of a 2 centavos postal stationery card demonstrates that different dies were produced for the postal stationery. The portrait appears identical but the ornamentation around it is very different.



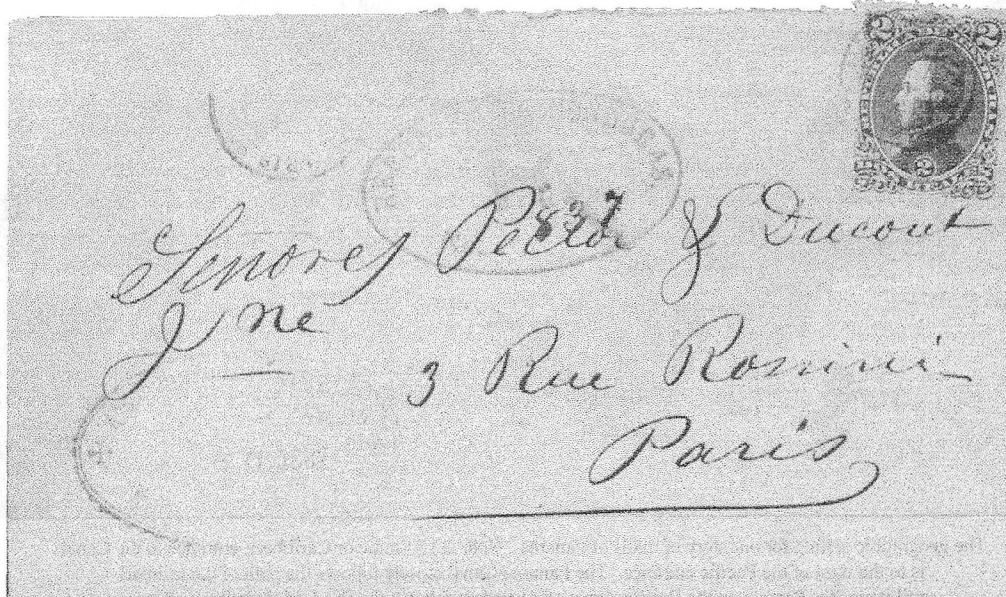
6 October 1886. A 2 centavos postal card from San Pedro Sula to Germany. The card has a New Orleans transit mark and a Stuttgart receiving mark.



25 March 1883. 1 real green tied by a large grid cancellation, probably of Amapala, on cover to London.

The 2 reales was issued in a fairly dull shade of blue, the 4 reales in vermillion, and the 1 peso in deep orange, which is inclined to show signs of sulphuretting.

The 2 reales has been chronicled as having been bisected diagonally, and each half used as a 1 real stamp: a copy is recorded so used in April 1878. This was probably done without authorisation.



20 August 1887. 2 reales deep blue on cover from Tegucigalpa to Paris. One of two known covers.

Perhaps an explanation of the currency would be of some interest, as clearing up the reason for three different units of currency being used in the set. There were $12\frac{1}{2}$ centavos to one real and 8 reales to 1 peso, thus 100 centavos to 1 peso.



to be continued

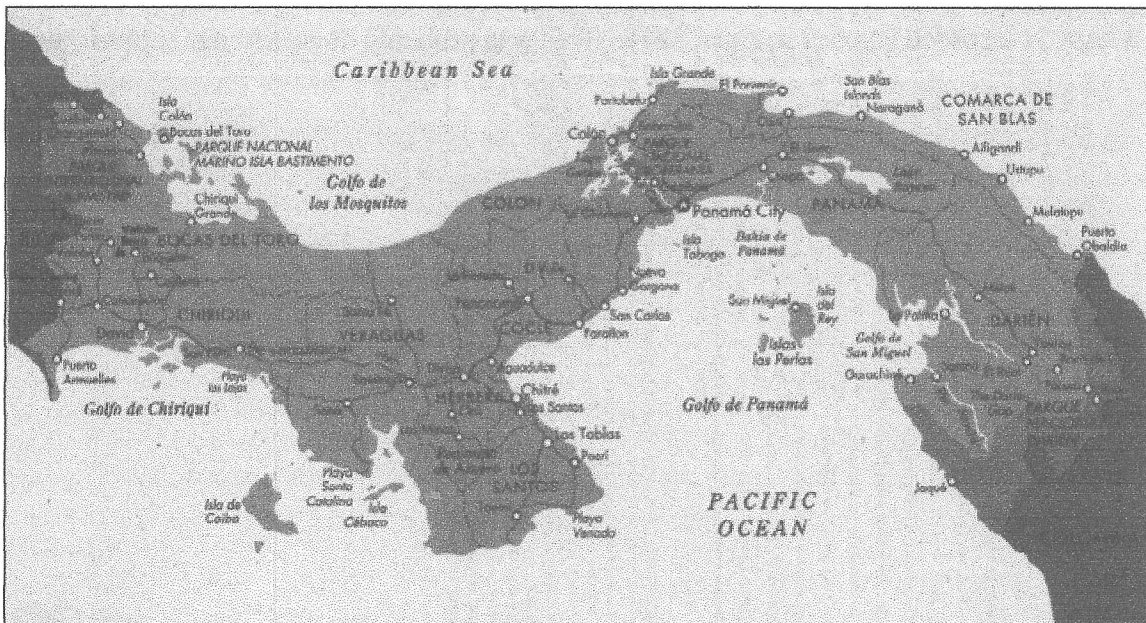
1 peso value

MAILS ACROSS THE ISTHMUS 1840-1955 - Part 1

from an unknown source

Nearly everyone knows of the Panama Canal and most have an understanding, however basic, of its construction and the controversy of recent years over who would operate the canal and under whose flag they would accomplish it. But the story of the USA and the activities of its citizens on the isthmus goes back further than the Teddy Roosevelt era when America was seized by the desire to "make the dirt fly at Panama".

It can truly be said that for nearly the first half of the 19th Century the interest level in Panama in the United States was close to zero, although some thought was given from time to time to a canal or railroad there. At home, however, momentous events were taking place which would soon transfer the narrow Isthmus of Panama into a household word. The Age of the Railroad was dawning and ambitious; farsighted men were causing railroads to be built throughout the more settled part of the country. Well into the 1840s Panama languished in the tropical sun, but this was soon to come to a sudden halt.



The geographic setting for our story of mails at Panama. Note the Atlantic or Caribbean entrance to the Canal is to the west of the Pacific entrance. The Panama Canal closely follows the path of the railroad until it reaches Paraiso on the Pacific slope; afterwards it follows the Rio Grande valley to the sea.

To put our story into geographical perspective let's look at the Isthmus of Panama - the Bridge of the Americas as it is referred to today in the Republic. Here the great Rockies-Andes mountain chain dips down to several passes only a few hundred feet high, a land of torrential downpours eight months of the year and skin parching drought for the remainder. In the 19th Century it was a sparsely populated economic backwater reduced to subsistence agriculture with little or no communications among its components, many of which had no feelings of nationhood.

On the Caribbean side only a few tiny villages clung to the white sand and coconut lined shores. One of these was a dismal group of thatched roof, cane sided huts at the mouth of the Chagres River and lying in the shadows of the once formidable Spanish bastion of Fort San Lorenzo where piles of rusty cannon balls and carriageless bronze cannon now lay where they had been left when the last Spanish soldiers departed the mainland earlier in the century. At this time the only way to the capital of the department of Panama which was ruled from far away Bogota was to pass up this river.

To look at the map one is first struck with the seemingly odd geographic position of this route. When one thinks of travelling from Atlantic to Pacific it is perfectly natural to think east-west, but in Panama it is just the reverse for the isthmus at this precise location is in the middle of a great "S" so that the mouth of the Chagres is actually to the west of Panama city (as well as north). So, to cross over one went to the south-east, a situation which still bewilders even seasoned travellers today. One must admit it is a trifle strange to see the sun set in the east, over the Atlantic!

Passing up the river, then, got one part way to the Pacific. Almost two-thirds of the way across the Chagres turned abruptly up into the mountains of its origin. The Spanish recognised this and built a road from Panama City to a spot close to the great bend of the river. The road, or trail, was called Las Cruces and it terminated at a small riverside settlement of the same name. From there the twenty-odd miles to the Pacific could be covered on foot or on muleback. The rest of Panama was of almost no consequence for there were no usable trails across the mountains and those precious few that existed literally led to nowhere. So, our focus in this story is on a small segment of land probably no more than a mile or two wide and some fifty miles long.

During the early part of the period addressed in this monograph the greater portion of the limited mail activity on the isthmus was actually handled by what are known as the "forwarders" or government mail agents. Today when we think of mail being sent overseas we scarcely give it a second thought except to perhaps ask the post office clerk what a letter costs to go to country X. Not so in the 19th Century! Even less do we realise that the trading or seafaring nations of the world found it absolutely necessary to have official government representatives stationed in many countries in order to handle such responsibilities. For the private firm there was scarcely any choice - the prudent businessman simply had to have agents in many countries to handle his interests there and more importantly to make sure he got his mail. There was just one way that a prudent businessman could be sure that the recipient would receive his letter and that was by sending multiples copies by different routes (if possible) on different ships - a tremendously time consuming and costly means of doing business.

Likewise the passing of mail across national frontiers was a further difficulty since most countries did not even have formal arrangements to govern the transfer of mail to or through their territory and most letters made the greater part of their trip through the good offices of ships' captains along the way.

NICARAGUA: POSTAL RATES FROM 1913 - Part 9

by MICHAEL P BIRKS FRPSL

Since writing Part 7 I have come across a cover to Brazil franked C1.00, which being made up of many small denominations must be deliberate. Since surface postage is 10c, the airmail surcharge to Brazil must be 90c.



Figure 1. Front and back of a cover to Brazil, franked C1.00.

In Part 8 I made certain suggestions with regards to the change in registration rates. Subsequent research suggests that the registration rates for both Pan-American and overseas rates increased in 1953 at the same time.



Figure 2 (left) 25 April 1953. A single rate registered cover to the United States, franked 75c, consisting of 30c airmail postage, 5c obligatory tax and 40c registration, recently increased from 20c.

Figure 3 (below) 16 March 1953. Front and back of a single rate registered cover to Switzerland, franked C1.50, made up of 85c airmail postage, 5c obligatory tax and 60c registration, recently increased from 40c.

These covers demonstrate that registration rates to both Pan-American and European destinations had increased by early 1953.

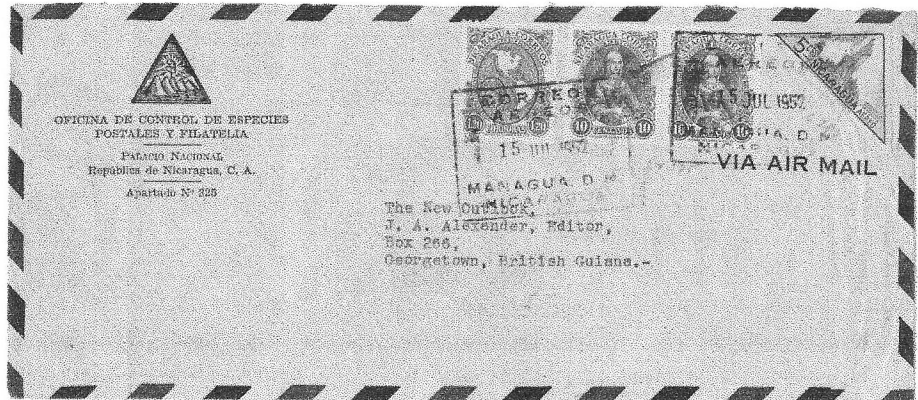
Figure 2.



Figure 3 (front and back)

Figure 4 (right).

15 July 1952. A cover from the Philatelic Bureau, which in my experience of examining covers usually gets its rates right! The cover is franked C1.40 which relates only to the airmail surcharge in the case of official covers, suggesting a single letter rate of 70c to British Guiana.



Confirmation that the rate to North America includes Mexico is given by the cover below, Figure 5, which is franked 35c, made up of 30c airmail plus 5c obligatory tax (franked separately but with a postage stamp).

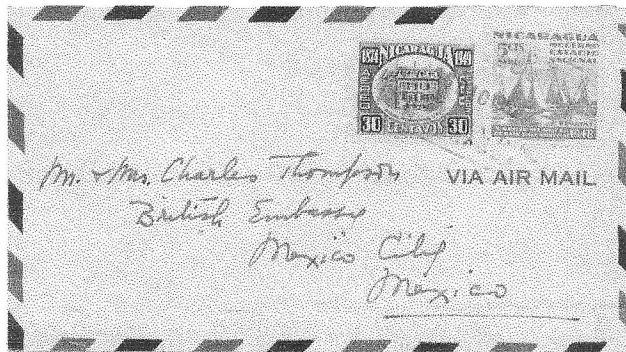


Figure 5 (left).

16 December 1962. A cover from Managua to Mexico City franked 35c, made up of 30c airmail postage plus 5c obligatory tax.

A further increase had taken effect by 6 August 1959

Pan-American Rates

North American rates were increased from 30c to 35c per 5g to which must be added the 5c obligatory tax

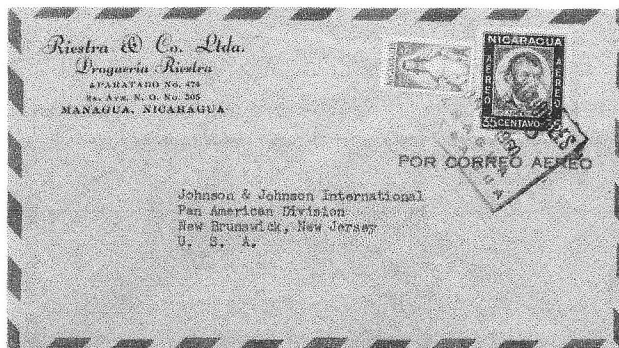


Figure 6



Figure 7

Figure 6 is a cover to the United States franked 40c made up of 35c airmail postage and 5c obligatory tax. Figure 7 is a similar rate but the obligatory tax is incorporated in one of the postage stamps.

823 x 3 25

C437 x 3 30

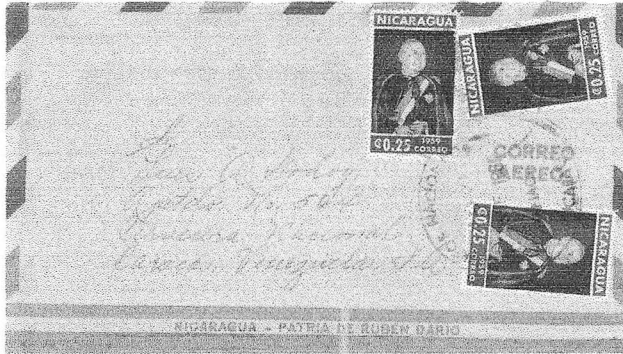


Figure 8



Figure 9

Figure 8 is a cover from Managua to Venezuela. It is franked 75c which incorporates 5c obligatory tax, leaving an airmail rate of 70c to Northern South America. Figure 9 is a registered cover from Managua to Mexico. Since the rate to North America and Mexico is 35c, to which must be added 5c obligatory tax, this leaves a registration fee of 50c for Pan-American destinations.

Overseas Rates

The European rate was increased to C1.15 for 5 grams and an additional 5c obligatory tax had also to be paid.

827 100 824 5 RA65 5



Figure 3

Figure 3. 20 October 1960. A single rate cover to Switzerland franked C1.05 plus 5c obligatory tax.

Figure 4. 20 June 1960. A double rate cover to Switzerland franked C2.10 plus 5c obligatory tax.

Figure 5. 26 June 1962. A triple rate cover to Switzerland franked C3.30 consisting of 3xC1.05 plus 5c obligatory tax.



Figure 4

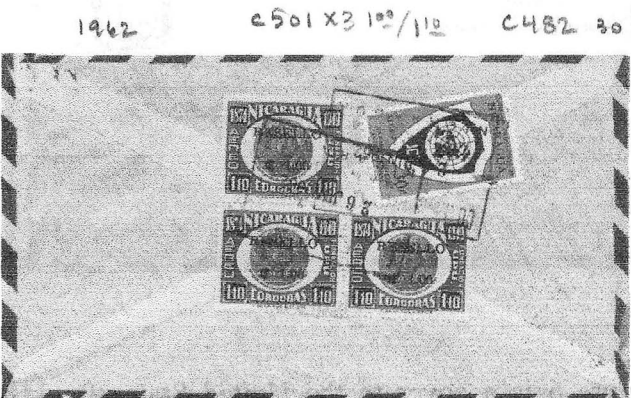


Figure 5

C435 2⁰⁰ C436 5⁰⁰ RA73 5 C501 X3 1⁰⁰/110



Figure 6 (left).

26 May 1962. 10xC1.05 plus 5c obligatory tax = C10.55. (45-50g).

C104 50/100

Registration was 1 Cordoba. 828 2⁰⁰ 824 5

RA 65 5



Figure 7 (left).

13 December 1961. A single rate, registered cover to England franked C2.10, made up of C1.05 postage, 5c obligatory tax and C1.00 registration.

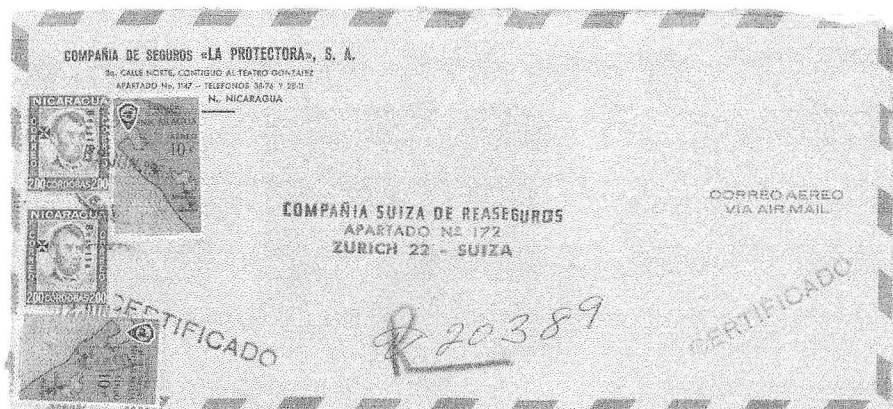


Figure 8 (left).

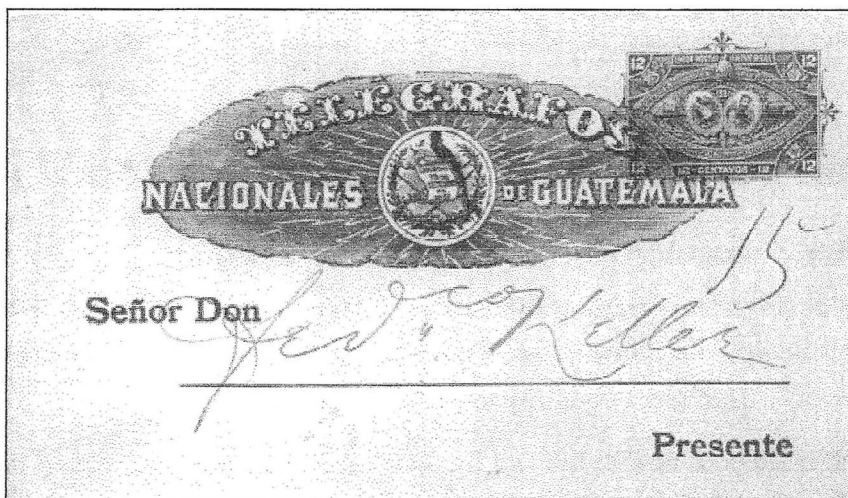
12 June 1961. A triple rate, registered cover to Switzerland franked C4.20, made up of 3 x C1.05 postage, 5c obligatory tax and C1.00 registration.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

from DEREK PALMER
of Santiago

Herewith a photocopy of a rather nice Telegraph envelope from Guatemala which I came across amongst my accumulations.

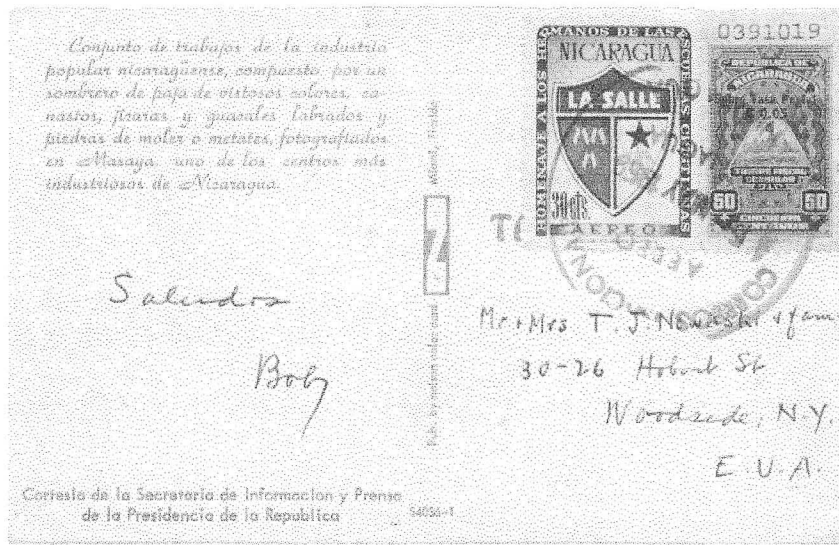
(Reduced to 75%)



NICARAGUA: TWO "NEW" TAX STAMPS

by MICHAEL P BIRKS FRPSL

Whilst examining my covers for the rate study I am currently undertaking, I came across the picture postcard and cover illustrated below.



(Left) 5 May 1959. A picture postcard from Managua to the United States, franked 30c plus 5c obligatory tax.

(Both items reduced to 80%)

(Below) 28 May 1959. A cover from Managua to the United States franked 70c (double rate) plus 5c obligatory tax.



What is unusual about these covers are the tax stamps. The upper card bears a blue 50c consular fiscal stamp surcharged "Sobre Tasa Postal" above "C0.05", horizontally in black, in small sans-serif letters. The lower cover bears a similar stamp surcharged with the same legend but vertically downwards in red, in slightly larger seriffed letters.

These are both new to me and I would welcome further reports of these stamps.